

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Commentary and follow-up activity on decisions reached at last month's summit meeting in Uruguay are still being given considerable attention by a number of Latin American governments.

Peruvian Foreign Minister Vasquez, who earlier had briefed his country's Senate on the presidents' meeting in terms rather critical of the US, spoke to the lower chamber on 4 May on the same subject but this time avoided blaming Washington for the "short-comings" of the summit. Delegates to the 12th annual session of the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America now meeting in Caracas have given some attention to the summit's guidelines on Latin American economic integration, although their major concern has been with the trade problems of underdeveloped countries.

Several governments remain preoccupied with problems affecting their domestic stability. Government forces in Bolivia continue to engage in sporadic clashes with guerrillas, and appear to be reacting just about as ineffectively as they did when the guerrillas first appeared two months ago. Dominican President Balaguer's tough 8 May speech may not succeed in stemming recently increasing political terrorism and may in fact serve to accelerate the trend toward a sharp left-right polarization in Dominican politics. In Guatemala, the activities of rightist terrorists in the capital have recently increased again, but the Mendez government believes it has the situation under control.

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RENEWED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN BOLIVIA

Guerrillas ambushed an army patrol in southeastern Bolivia on the night of 8 May, inflicting light casualties on the government force. This incident is the first reported encounter with the insurgents since 25 April. Once again, government losses are attributed to poor training and lack of experience.

The army's strategy has been to try to encircle the guerrillas, cutting off avenues of escape and access to food and supplies, rather than to engage in a direct confrontation against a well-armed and disciplined insurgent band.

President Barrientos is pressing the US for additional automatic weapons, bombs, and support aircraft. He feels, as do his military commanders, that these supplies are necessary to enhance the morale of the Bolivian forces, increase their aggressiveness, and promote their combat efficiency. He tends to discount the need for training in the use of new weapons.

Failure to move soon against the guerrillas, however, may permit them to exfiltrate the encirclement and establish a safe haven elsewhere.

Guerrilla successes against the army may be spurring other dissident elements into action.

Although the guerrillas do not pose an immediate threat to political and economic stability, prolongation of the insurgency will force the government to divert its meager economic resources to military use as well as cut back needed development projects. The short-term effect would be a slowdown in economic progress with a concomitant increase in popular discontent. Moreover, the failure of the government's counterinsurgency campaign could further strain relations between Barrientos and the armed forces--his most important power base.

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